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THE INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATION OF A SCIENTIFIC SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY[1]

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ABSTRACT

How can the social sciences be solidly established?—The humanistic and social scientists in order to make their disciplines into true sciences must follow the workers in the physicochemical disciplines in extruding from their domains animatistic and other supernatural forces. For all sciences must be natural—must deal with actually observable phenomena. *The social scientist wrongly assumes psychics or animistic forces, such as instincts, are guaranteed by psychologists.* The psychologist today abides by the canons of natural science and studies interacting things, i.e., persons (reactions) and stimuli. *Social psychology, likewise a natural discipline, studies cultural reactions and institutions.* Cultural reactions and institutions both developed and modified through mutual interaction. *Mutual modifications of cultural responses and institutions tend in certain directions.* Any such definite tendency we look upon as a specific historical development. Historical developments of cultural phenomena influenced and conditioned in various ways, by non-human phenomena, by human but non-psychological phenomena, by psychological but non-cultural phenomena, and finally by competing or interacting cultural phenomena. *In no case, however, is any non-natural principle involved in a scientific description of social psychology.* It is suggested that the same principle holds for the other phases of human phenomena which are not included in the data of social psychology.

Undeniable is the fact that a tremendous need exists for a sound social science. Yet who would be so bold as to assert that such a much needed discipline actually exists? Unfortunately, what is today considered as social science constitutes for the most part a mass of unverified opinions or else trite inconsequential facts. And so it is with great envy that the social scientist looks across the border of his field to the natural science domain. For the natural scientist has established for himself many principles leading not only to the understanding of facts but also to the control of them. How different is the situation in the social science realm! So great and so pressing a series of problems as only human phenomena can present us with is paralleled but by a slight and ineffective understanding of social facts.

[1] Paper read in the division on Psychic Factors in Social Causation at the Eighteenth Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Society held in Washington, D.C., December 29, 1923.

And yet conditions are not as hopeless as they appear. Here an earnest warning is in order. When we contrast the natural and social sciences we must be very careful not to embrace the myth concerning the entire sufficiency of the physicochemical disciplines as over against the complete deficiency of the social sciences. In the first place, the natural scientist is not always so rigid in his critical foundations as he might be, even though he is dealing with comparatively simple materials. On the other hand, the social scientist has or can have a vast amount of fundamental information concerning human phenomena, even though the circumstances of these phenomena may prevent him from making full use of such knowledge. We therefore deny the existence of an impassable barrier between the domain of the social and the physicochemical sciences implied by the use of the contrasting terms natural and social. All sciences are or should be natural. No science deals with anything but concrete and observable phenomena.

Why is it, we ask, then, that so far the methodological techniques of the social sciences have proved so much less adequate and less satisfactory in investigating facts than is true of the so-called natural sciences? Without doubt there must be some principle that has enabled the natural scientist to make such proportionately larger strides in the investigation of phenomena than is true for the social scientist. This principle we believe to be that, to a satisfactory degree, the so-called natural scientist has succeeded in extruding from his domain animatistic principles. As we have already suggested the ability of the natural scientist to rid himself of these animatisms is largely owing to the comparatively simpler nature of his data. Historically and traditionally, the objects which the physicist and chemist investigate have lent themselves much more readily to description and interpretation as they actually occur than happened to be the case with the data of the social sciences. In consequence as soon as the physicist or astronomer began to confine his investigations to the actual interactions of observable phenomena, he soon developed information and principles which were not only verifiable and firmly established, but principles which could also be used as stepping-stones to further knowledge and control. And so historically it was the physicist who first came to be the natural scientist.

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How different, on the other hand, has been the situation in the field of the human sciences. Here the data have not been investigated as they actually occur and operate, but have been handled in some manner as non-natural happenings. Even today, the human or social sciences are still choked with innumerable conceptions of the animatistic type. Such conceptions of supernatural forces, because of their partial concealment, are all the more insidious in their effect. They definitely prevent us from actually arriving at accurate information concerning our date. This unfortunate situation is nowhere so prominent in the field of the social sciences as at the point where they border upon and make use of psychological principles. This is true because the social scientist believes himself justified in keeping such animatisms by assuming that their respectability is guaranteed by psychology.

In spite of the fact that psychology really has nothing to do with such animisms we find the field of the human sciences literally weighted down with conceptions of psychic forces and psychic processes. Most frequently such psychics are constantly and conventionally employed as explanatory principles to account for the development and operation of social or human facts. It so happens that the instincts are among the most obnoxious of these animistic conceptions now in use. Whichever of the numerous meanings of instincts one may accept, the least harm that any of them can do is to absolve us from the arduous investigation of numerous intricate but essential psychological facts, necessary for the understanding of human conduct. As a matter of fact, however, always in the final analysis the conception of instincts comes down to a supernatural force. To be plain, instincts constitute the white man's version of what his colored cousins variously call *orenda*, *mana*, *wakanda*, or *manitou*.

Thus abjuring the employment of any animatistic principle in the study of human facts we may now suggest a more positive conception which may play a part in the firmer establishment of social psychology as a science. In this manner we plan to join forces with those workers in the social sciences who are interested in what we may consider as the psychological angle of human phenomena.

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Once more we may be reminded that the indispensable methodological minimum for any form of scientific investigation is the isolation and observation of the interactions of at least two actually observable things. In the psychological domain we can very definitely conclude that these interacting things are, on the one hand, the persons who perform reactions, or those reactions themselves, and on the other, the objects, conditions, and events constituting the stimuli for those reactions. Such phenomena are of course as directly and as readily observable as the data of any science. The origin of these phenomena can also be just as definitely traced out through the person's prior contacts with his stimulating objects and conditions. In this way we can delineate in a verifiable manner the actual development of memories, thoughts, wishes, beliefs, habits, feelings, willings, and desires of persons. Not only can we describe accurately the different types of specific acts that we perform, but also why such acts continue to operate and why they cease to function. In detail this means that the psychologist studies the reactional history and development of persons throughout their various contacts with their psychological environment. It is in this way and in this way only that the psychologist learns the nature and operation of the complex action of the human and other psychological organisms. And all these facts he discovers without the slightest resort to false and falsifying animatistic forces.

In brief, the psychologist is now able to study the data with which he deals as actual behavior of some definite and observable thing in precisely the same way as the physicist, chemist, or any other natural scientist does. Obviously such a study cannot fail to reveal whatever similarities there may be between the two types of facts, as well as the very fundamental differences between the behavior of the data of the physicochemical domain and the behavior of psychological organisms.

Now it is not only general psychology which may be considered as a definite natural science discipline, but social psychology as well. For the data of social psychology merely constitute particular types of psychological phenomena, namely, more complex forms of human behavior such as comprise in part our social, political, aesthetic, and economic activities. Just how do cultural or social reactions

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differ from non-cultural or individual psychological responses? The answer is merely in specific morphological and functional details. Individual or non-social responses, such as reflexes for example, differ from social reactions in no other way than hydrocarbons differ from carbohydrates in the chemical domain, or, say, a gas differs from an electrolyte. In each scientific analysis we find merely that a different type of organized phenomenon interacts with another such natural thing.

More marked, however, is the difference between the *stimuli* for cultural conduct and the stimuli for non-cultural reactions. This difference we signalize by the use of the name institution for the stimuli of cultural reactions. The problem of social psychology, then, is to study the origin and operation of cultural responses to institutional stimuli. It is precisely through such an exact study of the interaction of persons with institutions that we can arrive at a series of fundamental principles for a scientific social psychology. These principles constitute the psychological materials which more particularly, though not exclusively, concern the sociologist, economist, anthropologist, and other students of human facts. In detail, it is this principle of interacting institutions and persons which provides these students of human phenomena with the answers as to how and why, for instance, we are or are not believers in God, or a particular god, why we believe in war or in the law of supply and demand, why we wear trousers or skirts, why we have one wife or husband or more, why we are humble and resigned as orientals, or arrogant and assertive as occidentals, why we speak English or Chinese, why we have few children or many, and so on throughout every instance and phase of our actions, whether beliefs, thoughts, habits, desires, aspirations, or whether classified as moral, aesthetic, political, economic, or religious activity.

Is it not plain, then, that we are entirely able to dispense with mystic potencies and powers or animatistic forces of any sort when we are seriously attempting to understand such phenomena? The very fact of studying these phenomena as definite interactions of human beings with their stimuli conditions forces upon us the conviction that such human facts are not the workings out of primordial forces inherent in the nature of things or human beings. Rather

such a study convinces us that human phenomena are the cumulative effects of the interaction of the natural human being with the no more natural objects among which he actually finds himself. For let us observe that institutional stimuli, no matter how complex they may be, or how much the product of human manipulation, or contrivance, are just as natural as the astronomer's planets or the chemist's compounds. Plainly, in the study of the development of human beings and their correspondingly developing institutions we discover the natural foundations for and the natural evolution of our complicated human conduct and institutions. Moreover, these natural foundations we discover in exactly the same way as the biologist traces out the development of the biological organism beginning from the first contact of two elementary cells, and continuing through the contacts of the product of their union with the food, atmosphere, and other surrounding conditions. In no different way, therefore, than that of any other scientist, can the social psychologist trace out the development of our complicated social behavior from simpler types of conduct, until he comes down to the final and most elementary type of psychological action which is the response not to institutions but to individual stimuli, such as unconventionalized stones, trees, houses, etc.

Now we face the necessity of more definitely describing the two interacting things of social psychology, namely, the complicated cultural response with which the social scientist is mainly concerned, and the institutions constituting the stimuli for such responses. Let us consider first the cultural reaction. Immediately we might point out that although cultural responses may differ so widely in morphological character from non-cultural reactions as the pain reflex differs from the act of praying, the primary differences between cultural and non-cultural reactions are functional in character. For instance, the morphological character of my individual reaction of believing that the ventilation in this room is defective, is the same as the morphological character of my cultural act of believing that a monarchy is not a good form of government. That is to say, as belief responses these two actions, when dissociated from their specific stimuli conditions, differ little. When we do include their respective stimulational conditions the variation between these two

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reactions is enormous. Still greater is the difference between cultural and non-cultural reactions when we consider the reactional biography or history of the person during which the actions were developed. For it is only owing to the person's different contacts with his stimuli that the individual and cultural types of reactions function as entirely different forms of human facts.

So far as the non-cultural action is concerned, my contact with the stimulus object results in a private and unique experience and the acquisition of a purely personal mode of conduct. Contrariwise, the contact with the stimulus in the cultural situation is quite different. In that case the reactions I perform are owing to a definite cultural or social experience which we call the culturalization process. Why I have this reaction and why it operates is explained on the basis that I, as a particular individual, have acquired my behavior equipment under certain social or cultural auspices. These auspices in detail amount to the fact that the individuals with whom I live or have lived have in the course of their contact with their surroundings acquired or built up specific types of behavior. Thus if I had been a German of 1913 I most likely could not have had as part of my equipment the belief that monarchy is not the best form of government. How entirely natural, that is to say, how much a matter of interaction of persons and stimuli conditions, cultural conduct really is, we may observe from the fact that not all Germans had this belief as part of their equipment. Nor do all Americans now believe that monarchy is not the best form of government. What is true of this specific illustration is true of every actual cultural response. Here we have merely run into the fact that there are all sorts of cultural groups existing in any particular community and that these groups overlap and interpenetrate. We want to suggest again the entirely natural and concrete development of our national, racial, and other group cultural responses. Consequently in our investigation of such reactions we need not inject into them any animatistic or other mystic forces or powers.

Now we may come to grips with the stimulus for cultural behavior, or with the problem of the institution itself. Just what is an institution? We answer that an institution is a common stimulus, that is to say, any object or situation the contact with which results in

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the building up and later operation of conventional and conformity responses. An institution is then nothing more nor less than a stimulus in exactly the same sense as any object in any other department of psychology. An institution is an inciter to action, both in the sense of acquiring a response and in prompting it to operate after its acquisition. Such stimuli or institutions may be well illustrated by the elementary facts of language acquisition and performance. When I first began to perform indirect or referential reactions to things, I acquired the verbal reaction "milk" when I wished or needed to refer to that object. This specific reaction as an actual human occurrence was acquired by me because of the specific verbal stimulation of those individuals among whom I lived. Had I been brought up with other individuals, among whom different language institutions existed, I would then have built up the reactions "milch," "lait," or any of the other thousand types of language action. Here is an entirely natural situation which we can study in just as rigorous and absolute a way as the operation of a lever or the action of a toxin upon a biological organism.

Various kinds of institutions exist. In our illustration the institutional stimulus, or the word "milk," was itself an action. It happens that this particular kind of institution is among the most elemental and constant that we find among the whole range of human activities. For such stimuli and their co-ordinate responses are common features of the activities of all mankind. Besides language institutional stimuli, we also find among all peoples other ways of acting such as dancing, worshiping, courting, eating, kissing, cooking, dressing, etc. All these actions constitute institutional stimuli for the building up of cultural reactions. Thus the whole range of beliefs, ceremonials, thoughts, ideals, and technical, political, and aesthetic activities of individuals constitutes the inevitable institutions for the developing of cultural responses in the newborn infant or the immigrant adult. Reactions of course constitute only one single type out of a great many such institutions or stimuli. Others comprise things of all sorts, houses, trees, building materials, sun, moon, stars, women, men, etc.

Institutions, then, differ from other stimuli merely in the kind of functional properties which they have. They differ from other

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stimuli in calling out conformity and conventional responses. This means to say that the same natural object normally serves different functional purposes in different groups. Thus, for example, such an object of nature as the sun may or may not have an institutional function in any particular group. When it does not have institutional character each person reacts to it in a purely individual or non-cultural manner. Such happens to be practically the situation among the urban population of Europe. When the sun does have an institutional stimulus function each person reacts to it in an ingrained common fashion.

Let us now turn to the question as to the origin of the numerous institutions in every human community. The source of both the origin and development of institutions follows from the principle that they are merely the surrounding objects, customs, ideas, etc., which through the actions of individuals have taken on certain cultural stimulational functions. Briefly, institutions are originated through the development of newer forms of actions than have previously existed in any particular community. In any group we may observe how a particular institution, such as a religious stimulus, is originated by the modifications in action owing to economic or military conduct. Think only of the different Jehovahs and Zeuses which directly reflected the changing economic and political conditions of the early Hebrews and Greeks. Conversely, changes in military institutions may be originated through conduct developed in contact with religious, economic, or moral institutions of particular sorts. Emphatically, then, institutions originate merely through extreme modifications of action. The underlying principle of institutional change involves the same principles of action that make for smaller changes or simpler developments of institutions. The latter are merely less striking or radical in form. Similarly, the conservation and preservation of institutions operate upon the same principle, namely, the repression or non-continuation of activities which would tend to introduce new forms of conduct with the consequent endowment of the stimuli with new stimulational function. Another very striking mode of appearance of institutions in a particular group is that of borrowing or other overt transmission from one group to another of objects, techniques, ideas, and other institutions.

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All the changes in cultural reactions and their concomitant modifications in institutional stimuli may be characterized as historical developments. This historical interaction of responses and stimuli with its concomitant modification of both the institutions and cultural conduct has of course definite influences; so that an adequate study of the growth and development of cultural conduct and institutions indicates the presence of definite conditions tending to give particular direction to the historical development.

Among the simpler conditions determining and influencing the line of cultural development are the actual presence of certain physical objects in the surroundings of the individual. Thus we find that particular temperature conditions, geological formations, the presence of minerals, water courses, and frontiers may have very direct influence upon the historical development of culture. These simpler environmental surroundings operate ordinarily by becoming first the stimuli for general psychological reactions and later for cultural conduct. The cultural history of social psychological processes are conditioned then by natural or non-cultural phenomena.

Very similar in their influence upon the cultural history of institutions are non-psychological human facts, such as the economic levels of populations, military movements and occupations, intellectual and religious status of a people, etc. Such facts, though not unrelated to conventions and institutions, must, because of the way they operate, be considered as natural phenomena precisely as physical objects are.

More complex in their influence upon cultural history are the non-cultural or individual psychological activities of persons. Here we refer to the activities of men and women, loves, hates, intrigues, etc., which have an effect perhaps primarily upon the laws, customs, and similar institutions, and secondarily upon other sorts of cultural conduct and cultural institutions.

And finally we might indicate the very direct effect upon cultural history of actual cultural factors. Having built up particular kinds of cultural responses to one institution means almost inevitably that those responses will directly influence our reactions to other institutions, with the consequent modification of the latter institutions.

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Immigrant children acquiring reactions of independence as responses to the freer economic and social institutions of the new country will not tolerate the existence of the imported institution of rigid paternal dominance in the family.

By tracing out in this manner the detailed descriptions of human conduct through the various causal conditions operating upon it, we can arrive at a thorough understanding of social behavior. Incidentally we have observed that such a detailed study rigorously preserves the distinction between what are and what are not psychological processes. This means to point out emphatically that psychological processes and data are not by far the exclusive facts of the human sciences.

Does such a natural science conception of social psychology still leave us with unsolved problems? It may be argued that our very insistence upon specific responses to specific stimuli limits our descriptive capacities. In other words, one may argue that true enough we have explained why it is that we participate in particular religious ceremonies and not in others, why we share particular beliefs and not others, why we have so many children and do such things with them and not others. But it may be said there still remains the questions why do we have religion at all, why do we have children, why do we live in groups, etc. In one sense we admit that we are not able to solve these problems, nor are these problems solvable by the principles we have mentioned nor the facts which they sum up. The sense in which we admit this failure is, however, one that does not carry us beyond a natural science description of whatever facts that we may study. When we inquire why we have religion at all it may be that we have merely pushed the study of our facts so far that it has left the specific domain of social psychology and has thus gone beyond our province. When we drive the problems of gregariousness and reproduction out beyond the domain of cultural phenomena we merely push them into the field of biological structure and biological adaptation, that is all. In the case of religion the immediate outer boundaries may still be psychological though non-cultural. Possibly it is the biological and geographical conditions making the human animal unable to cope with his sur-

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roundings which lead him perhaps universally to attempt a compensatory escape from his incapacities and frailty. For the most part to carry out human problems this far represents merely a broader interest than can be satisfied by a single special scientific investigation. But although such problems do not result in a complete check upon one's investigations, still no great courage is required to face the fact that in innumerable instances in every domain of science there are problems not immediately open to solution by the methods and ideas that we have present to hand. Certainly such a condition does not warrant us in injecting even in the slightest degree into our scientific domain any mystical and magical explanatory principles.

In the human sciences we cannot hope to avoid conditions similar to those the natural scientist faces. For example, with what attitude would one ask a physicist or an astronomer to explain why there are planets and why they operate upon each other according to the gravitational law? Is not such a question merely meant as a stimulus for the scientist to go deeper or wider into his problem if he can and to produce another and more profound set of co-ordinations of actually observable phenomena? Incidentally, of course, we expect the scientist to resist with all his powers the shattering of the natural science code which demands the study of interacting things.

And finally we should like to suggest that when we do come to these refractory facts so baffling to our observational powers, and need to construct some hypothesis in order to complete the descriptive picture we are attempting to construct, we must be governed by exactly the same rules as in our description of directly observable facts. No hypothesis may be framed which implies the existence of non-natural phenomena, nor which introduces principles not derived from actual observations at some other point in the investigation. Certain it is that to bring such animistic conceptions as instincts into the description or explanation of human phenomena means decidedly to commit this breach of the scientist's code. To study cultural phenomena in their psychological implications as the responses to institutional stimuli we believe makes entirely unnecessary, if it does not preclude, the possibility of thus violating the canons of a rational and valid science.

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DISCUSSION

WILLIAM F. OGBURN

It seems to me that much of the confusion noticeable in the writings of the last few years on the rôle of instincts in sociology is due in part to a lack of comprehensiveness of approach to the whole problem. To avoid confusion two distinct problems must be kept separate. One is the nature of instinct as a part of the inherited psychological equipment. The other is the relation of instinct to culture.

Some observers of social phenomena have found the factors more or less generally thought of as instincts so variedly manifested that they have been led to question whether there are such things as instincts. To others tradition is seen as so important an influence that they have claimed that instinct is of no significance for culture. Still others think that original instinctive nature is so powerful that it determines our social institutions, and hence for this reason that the nature of instinct is most important for sociology. These observations concern chiefly the second problem cited in the preceding paragraph and throw relatively little light on the first problem, namely, the nature of instinct as a part of the inherited psychological equipment, except as to its modifiability. But the fact that instincts are modifiable does not necessarily mean that there are no such things as instincts. There may, of course, be aspects of the nature of instincts of relatively little importance for sociology. Such would be the case with reference to the chemical nature of instinctive activity. It may make some difference to the sociologist as to whether instinct is mechanistic as Watson thinks or hormic as MacDougal claims; or whether there are three or three hundred instincts, or whether there are any separate instincts or not; but the difference to the sociologists as to which of these conceptions are true is no doubt less than the psychologist thinks. So also it may make little difference to sociology as to whether the instincts are found to be consolidations of reflexes or something different, or as to what may prove to be the true relation of instinct and emotion.

The sociologist must look to the psychologist for a description of the nature of instinct and he hopes that in time the concept may be clarified and made definite. My own interpretation of the trend of the evidence is that it strengthens the physiological-mechanistic-reflex-concept, and that patterns of activity are quite interrelated and not only numerous but of great variety in nature. But whatever the final delineation may be, I think sociologists are most interested in the degree of adaptability of instinct through environment and particularly cultural experience.

There is much psychological evidence on the learning process, habit, and the conditioned reflex, but among psychologists, particularly students of animal psychology and physiological psychology, the influence of culture over instinct is likely to be underestimated and the determining rôle of instinct in the creation of cultural phenomena is likely to be overestimated. The student

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of comparative social institutions is certainly impressed with the power of tradition to overlay instinct, and the variety of custom certainly raises grave doubts as to any domination of instinct in creating social institutions, except, of course, within broad limits.

From the sociological standpoint, then, Dewey's procedure in treating habit first and original nature second and his reluctance to classify separate instincts are quite understood. So, also, from this point of view there is no quarrel with his use of the terms, "impulse" and "habit" in a general sense. There is indeed much to be said for the argument that habits, learning, adaptability, custom, or culture are of more significance in explaining the variety of social phenomena than is a settlement of most of the moot questions as to the nature of instinct as a part of the inherited psychological equipment. If man's instincts were as invariable as those of the lower animals, then social phenomena would be largely determined by instinct and the sociologist would be more dependent on the psychologist for an account of the nature of the inherited mechanism.

Still, I think that the sociologist should hardly take so extreme a position as that of Kantor. I don't see how the sociologist can escape being interested in original nature. Kantor's own formula of response to institutional phenomena, implies not only institutions but also a responding mechanism. The responding mechanism varies in a great many different ways in different social problems, such as race, eugenics, religion, crime, leadership, and the family. Hence it is a variable factor and if this variation is correlated with variation in the social phenomena, then we must be interested in original nature. There are two sides to all social phenomena, original nature and culture. The culture historian may be only interested in the variations of the cultural factor and the psychologist may be interested chiefly in the variations of original nature. But a full understanding of most social problems involves a consideration of both factors. Original nature may vary over time as in progress, or by races as in race problems, or by individuals as in crime or insanity, or by particular motives as in politics or economics.

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